DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 458 CS 509 293

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TITLE The Century Turns on the Basic Course: Two Remedies for Swelling Demands and Shrinking Resources.
PUB DATE Nov 96
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (82nd, San Diego, CA, November 23-26, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Computer Assisted Instruction; *Computer Mediated Communication; Departments; Higher Education; *Introductory Courses; *Speech Communication; *Teacher Developed Materials; Textbook Preparation; *Textbook Publication
IDENTIFIERS Educational Issues; Interactive Teaching; *Technology Integration

ABSTRACT

As the century draws to a close, basic communication instruction at America's universities and colleges is experiencing a barrage of externally determined assaults. Departments are increasing enrollments-per-section while facing a decrease in the number of sections being offered. The agenda of many 1990s state legislatures and the federal government is to cut and slash, combine and eliminate. Two remedies that offer potential relief are departmental basic course textbook publishing and computer-assisted instruction (CAI). The creation of a campus-specific text authored in-house offers several benefits, including accommodating local instruction distinctions, cost reduction by using a local printer, and generating revenues from the sale of the text. CAI can be integrated into the basic course in a number of ways. Interactive computer-based lessons (CBL) allow students to interact via a computer, freeing more class time for discussion and application. Interactive instruction modules provide tutorials, simulations, and worksheets. Computer mediated communication (CMC) can be used to support dialogue, maintain contact between students and instructors, exchange information, and assist in performance evaluation. The interventions warrant consideration but require scrutiny of substantial financial and ethical issues. (Contains 10 references.) (CR)

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CS509293

SCA Basic Course Commission
Competitive Papers Program
Fall 1996

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Abstract

The Century Turns on the Basic Course: Two Remedies for Swelling Demands and Shrinking Resources

As the century draws to a close, basic communication instruction at America's universities and colleges is experiencing a barrage of externally determined assaults. Two remedies that offer potential relief are departmental basic course textbook publishing and computer-assisted instruction (CAI). The interventions warrant consideration but require scrutiny of substanial financial and ethical issues.

As the century draws to a close, basic communication instruction at America's universities and colleges is characterized by increasing enrollments-per-section while the number of sections being offered is decreasing (Gibson, Hanna & Leichty, 1990). The agenda of many 90's state legislatures and the federal government is to cut, slash, combine and eliminate. Some speech communication departments are surviving retrenchment death sentences (e.g., Nebraska), others are not (e.g., Virginia). Basic course directors coordinate the efforts of full-time faculty, GTAs, and adjunct faculty to service an environment that must additionally cope with new regulatory concerns (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; Higher Education Act P.L. 102-325--as reauthorized on July 23, 1992). Two remedies that offer potential relief from this barrage of externally determined assaults are departmental basic course textbook publishing and computer-assisted instruction (CAI). The interventions warrant consideration but require scrutiny of substanial financial and ethical issues.

Departmental Textbook Publishing: Cash Cow or Ethical Albatross

Standardization

For introductory communication courses (ICCs) offered in locally distinct learning environments the creation of a campus-specific text that is authored in-house offers several benefits. Whether an ICC is staffed with full-time faculty, GTAs, or adjunct faculty standardization of instruction is often a concern. Normally, the ICC fulfills a campus-wide general education requirement which necessitates that multiple sections be offered each term. In fact, regional accrediting associations for universities and colleges provide compelling support for expanded communication coverage among general education requirements that would, if acted upon, require further standardization (see Newburger, 1996).

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools stipulates, for example, that each institution "**must** demonstrate that its graduates are competent in reading, writing, *oral communication*, fundamental mathematical skills..." (The 1995 Edition of the Criteria for Accreditation, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools--Transition Document, p. 13). "Case building for expanding communication general education core requirements finds additional support in the accreditation handbooks of the North Central, Western, New England, and Northwest Associations [e.g., the 1994-95 North Central handbook details that college-level experiences should engender competencies in speaking, listening, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal skills (see pp. 21, 22); the 1991 Western Association handbook stipulates that undergraduate studies ensure competence in oral communication and argument (see 4.B.2)]" (Hemenway, 1994, pp. 1-9).

Campus-specific Curriculum

A number of universities follow "a campus-specific ICC curriculum that may not be well served by texts generated from the national market. Current ICCs emphasizing speaking and writing (e.g., Illinois, Iowa) and mediated communication components (e.g., Michigan State)" (Newburger, Smith, & Pledger, 1993, p. 35) may have to resort to combining texts with course packs or any number of alternatives to meet their unique needs. Considering the campus-wide nature of many ICC student populations, the variety of faculty teaching the course, and potential campus-specific instructional treatments, an in-house generated text may account for local instructional distinctions while simplifying, in part, means for standardization.

Nuts and Bolts

Departments choosing to author their own text will have to determine who will write it. Large, graduate degree granting departments may prefer the writing of the text to be under the supervision of the ICC director ("Let the director shoulder the burden"). Smaller departments may enlist each faculty member's participation, dividing the responsibility for the composition of individual chapters. Regardless of the eventual methodology devised, departments will be confronted with a decision concerning whether to use a national publishing house or local commercial printer. National publishing houses involved with departmental textbook publishing (e.g., Kendall/Hunt, McGraw-Hill) "can work through subcontractors to provide necessary support materials that a departmental faculty might find too time consuming to produce (e.g., text indexes). The final product has the same professional quality of competing texts including a nicely designed cover, a number of appropriate illustrations, and a comprehensive index. Several national publishers prefer departmentally authored texts to undergo the same professional publication process that individual authors are bound to. The publishers solicit 'blind' peer reviews and request corresponding departmentally authored revisions. The publisher negotiates a royalty percentage with the department that normally does not exceed 18% of the price of the book (before the campus bookstores mark it up). The department receives royalty payments for all local sales and other-campus adoptions and must negotiate its own deal concerning whether local and other-campus sales will receive the same royalty percentage" (Newburger, Smith, & Pledger, 1993, pp. 33-34).

"Speech communication departments may alternatively decide to use departmental desktop publishing software (as accessable as a computer and high resolution laser or ink-jet printer) to write, edit, design, and present a 'camera-ready' ICC text manuscript to a local commercial printer. The 'front end' printing costs are normally deferred by the printer

who receives payment from initial campus bookstore sales. The use of a local printer eliminates a third party to share text proceeds with, which allows for as much as 70% of text generated revenues to be returned to the department. The adoption of this publishing approach makes the acquisition of 'blind' peer reviews more difficult than if handled by a third party. Additionally, support materials (e.g., indexes, glossaries) will have to be locally prepared" (Newburger, Smith, & Pledger, 1993, p. 34).

Regardless of whether a national publisher or local commercial printer is used, substantial revenues will be generated from a departmentally authored text. Some departments may include tear-out exercises with their text (eliminating the "used" textbook market) or may include a separate workbook as part of a text package. **The euphoric "behold what we have have accomplished" must be tempered with, however, a sincere recognition of how the final product serves the captive student audience forced to consume it.** Should proper attention not be given to such matters as acquiring sufficient peer reviews or providing necessary indexes, then the new departmental "cash cow" will amount to nothing more than an ethical albatross.

Computer-assisted Instruction: Do You Suffer from "Technopedagogiophobia"?

"Technopedagogiophobia' (the fear of using advanced technology in instruction) keeps many communication educators from using the computer in the classroom" (Hemphill & Standerfer, 1993, p. 144). Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) can, however, be usefully integrated into basic courses in a variety of ways. Interactive computer-based lessons (CBL), for example, "allow students to interact via a computer with any combination of videotape, videodisc, film, slide, and graphic materials. In most cases, the student can view a segment of a module and respond to it. Based on that response, appropriate video/textual information is provided" (Cronin & Kennan, 1994,

p. 2). The development of a variety of interactive instructional modules providing tutorials, simulations, and worksheets can enable ICC students to gain practice in such activities as constructing effective introductions and conclusions for public speeches (Cronin & Kennan). CBL is user-friendly, allows the learner to control the progress of the lessons, and frees-up class time for meaningful discussion and application. CBL ranges from drill-and-practice to sophisticated lessons (see Hemphill & Standerfer, 1987; Newburger, 1993, p. 140).

Another application of computers for ICC instruction involves computer-mediated communication (CMC). Phillips and Santoro (1989) indicated that CMC can be used to: support dialogue, maintain contact between students and instructors, exchange information, and in performance evaluation. "CMC provides for continuous communiction between students, instructors, and consultants by allowing for convenient transfer of centrally-stored information and permitting participants to exchange information or disseminate it to all or selected lists of participants" (Phillips and Santoro, 1989, pp. 151-152). CMC can involve the utilization of: Documentation Manuals (to introduce participants to the system); Electronic Mail (to transfer messages, data, assignments, questions evaluations, etc.); and Modified Bulletin Board Systems (used for public information and open conferencing) [see Phillips and Santoro, 1989; Newburger, 1993].

"The Higher Education Act (HEA) P. L. 102-325 (as reauthorized on July 23, 1992) replaces the term *physically handicapped* with 'individuals with disabilities' as defined under section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This change results in the need for ICC faculty to provide reasonable accommodations for ensuring that learning opportunities are accessible to individuals with learning disabilities, mental disabilities, psychiatric disorders, drug or alcohol addiction, as well as for those with physical disabilities" (Newburger, 1994, p. 181). Computer-assisted instruction (CAI)

may provide some students with learning impairments covered by the Higher Education Act (sufficient to inhibit their performance with certain basic course activities or assignments) alternative ways to demonstrate course mastery. Perhaps the ability to privately control the pace of lessons through CAI would, for example, "mainstream" students who, by virtue of a learning disability (e.g., spoken language processing difficulties, clinical depression), would otherwise be lost in a more traditional classroom setting.

Surely, the startup costs for initiating a computer-assisted instruction facility would require close scrutiny. Additionally, many basic course instructors would need some level of training regarding the use of such facilities and their related equipment and software. The time freed-up for meaningful classroom discussion and applications and potential mainstreaming benefits may more than offset these monetary and time-bound costs.

Summary

Both departmental introductory communication course textbook publishing and computer-assisted instruction offer potential relief from increasing externally generated demands and diminishing resources confronting contemporary basic course directors. The adoption of either intervention will require consideration of multiple issues, a significant time investment, and, in the case of CAI, significant start-up costs. Departmentally authored ICC texts offer gains in course standardization, adaptation to campus-specific student audiences, and growth of departmental revenues--but ethical considerations must be properly addressed. CAI offers gains in class time and potential mainstreaming benefits, but start-up costs and faculty training requirements will be significant. The financial and human resource demands associated with CAI may be balanced by the increased accessibility this intervention may provide for learning impaired students. Considering the compelling support presented in the criteria for accreditation for most universities and colleges, that undergraduates must experience gains in a variety of communication proficiencies, the increased accessibility issue may fortify a department's proposal for requested funding.

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